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Testimony:

Introduction

Good Morning. My name is Wendy Hamilton and I am the National President of Mothers Against Drunk Driving. MADD's mission is to stop drunk driving, support the victims of this violent crime and prevent underage drinking. I am honored to be here today to testify on the critical public health issue of illegal youth alcohol use.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Chairman DeWine and Senator Dodd for holding this hearing today and for their continued commitment to protecting America's youth. Senators, your leadership has been and will be so important in bringing underage drinking prevention to the forefront of our nation's policy agenda.

I would also like to recognize and thank Senators Arlen Specter, Robert Byrd, Tom Harkin, John Warner, Harry Reid, and Representatives Lucille Roybal-Allard, Frank Wolf and Zach Wamp for requesting the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) report and for their efforts to reduce underage drinking. MADD looks forward to working with this Committee and with Congress to develop prevention policies that provide adequate attention and funding -- and employ effective strategies -- to save young lives.

Today's hearing is truly historic -- never before has the federal government considered action to develop a comprehensive strategy to prevent underage drinking, even though underage alcohol consumption is the nation's number one youth illegal drug problem. The NAS has assembled the nation's top public health researchers to examine a problem that has been overlooked for far too long. NAS has done an outstanding job cataloguing research and making science-based recommendations that if implemented will save lives. The public health and safety community has been pursuing action at the federal level for many years on this issue, but only now has the necessary national dialogue begun. With this Committee's leadership, the national spotlight will finally shine on this sorely neglected issue.

The Problem

Without question, alcohol is the most widely used drug among America's youth. It is illegal for people under the age of 21 to drink alcohol, and yet currently there are 10.1 million underage drinkers in this nation (2002 National Household Survey On Drug Use and Health). Alcohol kills 6.5 times more kids than all other illicit drugs combined and is a major factor in the three leading causes of death of America's teens: motor vehicle crashes, homicides and suicides. Underage drinking does not just harm the drinker: half of the people who die in traffic crashes involving underage drinking drivers are people other than the drinking drivers. Underage drinking is not harmless fun. There is no such thing as "responsible" underage drinking.

Progress was made in the 1980's, most notably with the raising of the minimum drinking age to 21 -- a law that has saved over 20,000 young lives. But we still have a national

mentality that accepts underage drinking as a mere "rite of passage," and underage drinking rates remain inexcusably high and have not improved for the past decade. According to 2002 Monitoring the Future data, nearly half (48.6 percent) of all high school seniors report drinking in the last 30 days, a much larger proportion of youth than those who report either using marijuana (21.5 percent) or smoking (26.7 percent). The proportion of high school seniors who report drinking in the last 30 days was the same in 2002 as it was in 1993. Additionally, 29 percent of seniors report having five or more drinks on at least one occasion in the past two weeks, a percentage virtually unchanged since 1993.

To bring these statistics to life, I would like to raise a recent incident involving youth alcohol use that made national news. A Sunday morning touch football game between suburban Chicago high school girls turned into a brutal hazing incident resulting in the hospitalization of five students, one with a broken ankle and another who needed 10 stitches in her head. Video tape of the event revealed that younger girls were beaten, splattered with paint and had mud and feces thrown in their faces. About 100 students were involved, including onlookers who cheered while waving cups of beer before the camera.

In one segment of the home video, sixteen and seventeen year old girls are seen being held upside down over a keg of beer by several boys while they drink straight from the tap. In another segment, several girls can be seen pounding on one girl with their fists while they push her down into the mud.

School officials cited alcohol as a major factor in the violence, and in the weeks that followed, police charged two parents with providing three kegs of beer to minors.

As the nation watched these broadcasts in horror, many teens likely did not bat an eye. The Chicago incident could have been filmed in almost any town. Today, teens have easy access to alcohol. They are saturated with irresponsible alcohol ads. Underage drinking laws are not well enforced. And, parents and communities often look the other way when kids drink, in many cases even providing the beer. We've all heard the line: "Well, at least they're not using drugs." The fact is, alcohol IS the illegal drug of choice for kids.

### Drunk Driving and Other Alcohol-Related Consequences Associated With Youth Alcohol Use

The consequences of youth alcohol use are staggering. Research demonstrates that the younger someone starts drinking, the more likely they are to suffer from alcohol-related problems later in life, including alcohol dependence and drunk driving. Children who drink before age 15 are four times more likely to become alcohol dependent than those who delay drinking until they are 21.

More than 17,000 people are killed each year in alcohol-related crashes and approximately one-half million are injured. In 2000, 69 percent of youth killed in alcohol-related traffic crashes involved underage drinking drivers. Although young drivers make up a mere 7 percent of the driving population, they constitute 13 percent of the alcohol-involved drivers in fatal crashes.

The 1999 National Survey of Drinking and Driving Among Drivers Age 16 – 20 revealed that youth drove 11 million times after drinking in the past year. Their average blood alcohol level was .10 percent, three times the level of all drivers who drove after drinking. Forty percent of youth who drove after drinking had a least one passenger in the

vehicle. Clearly young drivers are putting themselves at risk, but they are also putting others at risk. Society has an obligation to protect motorists from the risky behavior of underage drinkers. Society also has an obligation to protect kids from themselves. Alcohol is also implicated in a large portion of deaths and injuries caused by dangers other than drinking and driving. According to the NAS, nearly 40 percent of youth under age 21 who died from drowning, burns and falls tested positive for alcohol. Youth alcohol use is also associated with violence and suicidal behavior. Individuals under 21 commit 45 percent of rapes, 44 percent of robberies, and 37 percent of other assaults, and it is estimated that 50 percent of violent crime is alcohol-related.

Sexual violence, as well as unplanned and unprotected sexual activity, is another consequence of youth alcohol use. A 2002 National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) study titled “A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges” found that each year more than 70,000 students aged 18-24 are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape. Additionally, the report found that 600,000 students were assaulted by another drinking college student annually.

Long-term consequences of youth alcohol use have become more and more clear as research on the adolescent brain continues to emerge. The human brain continues to develop into the early 20’s. Studies show that heavy alcohol use by youth has disproportionately negative effects on the physical development of the brain, and that alcohol use during adolescence has a direct affect on brain functioning.

In addition to the human costs associated with underage drinking, the economic cost to society is staggering. It is conservatively estimated that underage drinking costs this nation \$53 billion dollars each year, including \$19 billion from traffic crashes and \$29 billion from violent crime. The NAS points out that this estimate is “somewhat incomplete” and “does not include medical costs other than those associated with traffic crashes” and other potential factors contributing to the social costs of underage drinking. The NAS concludes that “the \$53 billion appears to be an underestimate of the social costs of underage drinking.” (p. 70)

National Academy of Sciences Provides Roadmap for the Nation

The NAS report provides a significant and groundbreaking opportunity to help put the nation's number one youth drug problem on the national policy agenda and gives our nations’ leaders the impetus for concrete action. All of the NAS recommendations should be seriously considered by Congress, the Administration, and state and local leaders. The NAS strategy includes components that will involve leaders at all levels of government, community activists, parents, educators, businesses, law enforcement, youth and society at large.

The NAS roadmap includes ten main components:

1. National Adult-Oriented Media Campaign
2. Partnership to Prevent Underage Drinking
3. Alcohol Advertising
4. Entertainment Media
5. Limiting Access
6. Youth-Oriented Interventions
7. Community Interventions
8. Government Assistance and Coordination

## 9. Alcohol-Excise Taxes

## 10. Research and Evaluation

While MADD supports the NAS report in its entirety, my testimony will focus on areas MADD believes will have the greatest impact on reducing youth alcohol use.

### National Efforts to Combat Underage Drinking Woefully Inadequate

While illicit drugs and tobacco youth prevention have received considerable attention and funding from the federal government, underage drinking has consistently been ignored.

NAS confirms this:

In fiscal 2000, the nation spent approximately \$1.8 billion on preventing illicit drug use (Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2003), which was 25 times the amount, \$71.1 million, targeted at preventing underage alcohol use.” (p. 14)

Not only is there minimal funding available to states and local communities specifically targeted to reduce youth alcohol use, there is also no coordinated national effort to reduce and prevent underage drinking.

In May 2001 the General Accounting Office (GAO) released a report outlining federal funds aimed at preventing underage drinking. The report provided concrete evidence that: 1) the federal government’s approach to youth alcohol use prevention is disjointed and 2) funding for youth alcohol prevention is woefully inadequate.

GAO found that multiple federal agencies play some role in underage drinking prevention, and that only a very small portion – 7 percent – of total funds available for alcohol and other drug use both had a specific focus on alcohol and identified youth or youth and the broader community as the specific target population. Specifically, among the Departments of Health and Human Services, Justice and Transportation, a mere \$71.1 million dollars focused on youth or alcohol and youth and the broader community.

Citing the GAO and additional research, the NAS report concludes the following:

...there is no coordinated, central mechanism for disseminating research findings or providing technical assistance to grantees or others interested in developing strategies that target underage drinking...the committee is not aware of any ongoing effort to coordinate all of the various federal efforts either within or across departments. The multitude of agencies and initiatives involved suggests the need for an interagency body to provide national leadership and provide a single federal voice on the issue of underage drinking. (p. 236-237)

The NAS report also adds that “community efforts are most likely to succeed if they have strong and informed leadership” and that “resources are needed for training and leadership development for coalition and task force members as well as key decision makers.” (p. 237-238)

NAS Recommendations 12-1 through 12-6 demonstrate a clear need for better “Government Assistance and Coordination” at the national level in order to reduce underage drinking. MADD strongly supports implementation of NAS Recommendations 12-1 through 12-6:

12-1: A federal interagency coordinating committee on prevention of underage drinking should be established, chaired by the secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

12-2: A National Training and Research Center on Underage Drinking should be established in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This body would

provide technical assistance, training, and evaluation support and would monitor progress in implementing national goals.

12-3: The secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services should issue an annual report on underage drinking to Congress summarizing all federal agency activities, progress in reducing underage drinking, and key surveillance data.

12-4: Each state should designate a lead agency to coordinate and spearhead its activities and programs to reduce and prevent underage drinking.

12-5: The annual report of the secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on underage drinking should include key indicators of underage drinking.

12-6: The Monitoring the Future Survey and the National Survey on Drug Use and Health should be revised to elicit more precise information on the quantity of alcohol consumed and to ascertain brand preferences of underage drinkers.

### National Adult-Oriented Media Campaign

Six years ago, Congress allocated \$1 billion dollars to the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) for an anti-drug media campaign designed to prevent youth drug use. Despite the fact that alcohol is the number one youth drug problem – both then and now -- underage drinking prevention messages were excluded from the campaign.

MADD and other members of the public health and safety community pressed to have underage drinking prevention messages included in the ONDCP campaign. In May 1999, an amendment sponsored by Representatives Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA) and Frank Wolf (R-VA) was introduced that would change the authorizing legislation to allow ONDCP to begin including such messages. The proposed amendment came under attack and was eventually defeated due to intense pressure from the alcohol lobby.

Since 1998, Congress has considered creating a separate media campaign to prevent underage drinking, but those attempts also failed due to behind the scenes opposition from the alcohol industry. The alcohol industry instead pressured Congress to request a study as a means to delay action on a media campaign. The Congressional directive to NAS to develop a comprehensive strategy to prevent underage drinking dates back several years to repeated attempts by the public health and safety community to establish a media campaign that addresses youth alcohol use.

When the alcohol industry learned that the NAS might recommend prevention measures it opposes, alcohol interests tried to inappropriately influence the content of the report, fault the NAS expert panel, and criticize and discredit the findings while they were being formulated. Before the NAS report was even released, the beer industry took out full-page ads in Roll Call, the Hill, Congress Daily and other Capitol Hill publications in an attempt to discredit the report findings. The beer industry complained that they did not have enough influence on the NAS report.

MADD believes that the alcohol industry, and in particular the beer lobby, has not earned credibility on the issue of underage drinking prevention. As the nation attempts to get serious about employing effective, science-based strategies to curb the nation's number one youth drug problem, MADD urges the alcohol industry to stop its baseless opposition to proven public health measures and to stop relying on underage drinking as a source of revenue.

It is unacceptable that the alcohol industry has been the sole source of messaging to parents and teens on underage drinking. Congress decided that it wasn't a good idea to let tobacco companies be the sole voice in educating the public on smoking prevention. We believe the same should hold true for the alcohol companies on underage drinking.

MADD commends the NAS for calling for a national advertising campaign to prevent underage drinking and strongly supports NAS Recommendation 6-1:

6-1: The federal government should fund and actively support the development of a national media effort, as a major component of an adult-oriented campaign to reduce underage drinking.

The goals of the national media campaign, as explained by NAS, would be to instill a broad societal commitment to reduce underage drinking, to increase specific actions by adults that are meant to discourage underage drinking, and to decrease adult conduct that facilitates underage drinking.

The need for a comprehensive public education campaign aimed at underage drinking prevention is undeniable as most parents and teens are unaware of the dangers associated with youth alcohol use. Many parents do not recognize the prevalence of or the risks associated with drinking for their own children, and many parents even facilitate their underage children's drinking by giving kids access to alcohol, by not responding to children's drinking, and by not adequately monitoring their children's behavior.

NAS also concludes that an adult-oriented national media campaign is also important because it would support local efforts to reduce underage drinking. It is important not only because of what it will accomplish on its own, but also because its effects bolster local efforts.

#### Reducing Youth Exposure to Alcohol Advertising

Underage youth are bombarded with irresponsible alcohol marketing messages depicting alcohol consumption as cool, sexy and glamorous. The establishment of a national media campaign to prevent underage drinking is particularly important given the fact that in 2001 the alcohol industry spent 1.6 billion dollars on product advertising in the "measured media" (including magazines, newspapers, outdoor advertising, and radio and television). According to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), at least twice that amount was spent on unmeasured promotion, including sponsorships and product placement in entertainment media and other venues.

A recent study by the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY 2003) reported that in 2001 the alcohol industry spent \$23.2 million dollars to air 2,379 "responsibility" messages, while in contrast the industry spent \$812.2 million on 208,909 product advertisements. There were 179 product ads for every ad that referred to the legal drinking age. Quite significantly, a typical "responsibility" ad is branded with the alcohol company name, which leads many public health experts to conclude that "responsibility" ads are simply another means to promote brand recognition and loyalty.

MADD is not against alcohol advertising, but it is imperative that stricter standards be put in place to protect our children from constant exposure to alcohol messages. Although beer is the favorite alcoholic beverage among young people, the beer industry has advertised for years with little or no restrictions or standards from the networks. Strong

alcohol advertising restrictions must be mandatory for all segments of the alcohol industry – including ads for beer, wine, liquor and malt-based beverages.

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, underage drinkers consume about 10 percent of all the alcohol purchased in the United States, or 3.6 billion drinks annually. NAS reports that underage drinkers consume anywhere from 10 to 20 percent of all alcohol purchased in the U.S. Beer is the most common drink consumed in most cases of heavy drinking, binge drinking, drunk driving and underage drinking.

Now “malternatives” or “alcopops” have climbed onto the advertising bandwagon to capture more of the youth market (such as Smirnoff Ice, Bacardi Silver, and Skyy Blue). MADD is deeply concerned with the growing number of ads for liquor-branded, malt-based beverages that have a flavor and marketing plan that appeals to our kids. Just like beer, the distilled spirits industry is being given a “free pass” to establish brand recognition and loyalty among youth. NAS states that:

A particularly troubling illustration of the youth-specific attractions of an alcohol marketing campaign concerns so-called “alcopops,” sweet, flavored alcoholic malt beverages. Recent survey data suggest that these products are more popular with teenagers than with adults, both in terms of awareness and use. (p. 135)

Greater restrictions are also needed for print advertising. Despite the alcohol industry’s claims, CAMY reports that young people under 21 are reached at a higher proportion to their numbers in the population by alcohol ads. Our youth see far more beer, distilled spirits and malternative advertising in magazines than adults. In 2001 alone, nearly one-third of all measured magazine alcohol ads were placed in 10 publications with a youth audience of 25 percent or more.

NAS points out that the dispute over whether alcohol advertising “causes” underage drinking is simply an “unnecessary distraction” from the most important task at hand: the alcohol industry must do a better job of refraining from marketing products or engaging in promotional activities that appeal to youth. NAS concludes that if the industry fails to respond in a meaningful way to this challenge, the case for government action becomes compelling.

MADD supports all of the NAS recommendations on alcohol advertising, but in particular MADD urges action on NAS Recommendations 7-4 and 12-6:

7-4: Congress should appropriate the necessary funding for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to monitor underage exposure to alcohol advertising on a continuing basis and to report periodically to Congress and the public. The report should include information on the underage percentage of the exposed audience and estimated number of underage viewers for print and broadcasting alcohol advertising in national markets and, for television and radio broadcasting, in a selection of large local or regional markets.

12-6: The Monitoring the Future (MTF) Survey and the National Household Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) should be revised to elicit more precise information on the quantity of alcohol consumed and to ascertain brand preferences of underage drinkers.

Both of these recommendations call for basic public health surveillance that is essential

to identify and prevent the over-exposure of our youth to alcohol advertising. The availability of such data is needed to understand the actual youth impact of new products and the advertising campaigns that promote them.

#### Limiting Alcohol Access to Youth

Limiting youth access to alcohol is a proven way to decrease underage drinking. Most notably, increasing the minimum drinking age to 21 has been one of the most effective public health policies in history, resulting in a significant decrease in fatal traffic crashes, DWI arrests, and self-reported drinking by young people. However, the law alone does not preclude youth from gaining access to alcohol. General deterrence through sanctions, improved enforcement, and public awareness of enforcement is needed in order to effectively implement restrictions on youth alcohol use.

The NAS report points out that “[i]t is apparently not difficult for youth who want to drink to readily obtain alcohol. A majority of high school students, even eighth graders, report that alcohol is ‘fairly easy’ or ‘very easy’ to get, with the proportion increasing from eighth to tenth to twelfth grade.” For eighth graders, 60 percent report that alcohol is fairly easy or very easy to obtain, while for twelfth graders the percentage is more than 90 percent. The NAS also reports that the “alcohol most favored by underage drinkers is beer.”

A critical component of a comprehensive strategy to reduce underage drinking is to enact and strengthen laws designed to limit youth alcohol consumption. Although every state defines the legal minimum drinking age at 21, state laws vary in scope in terms of restrictions relating to underage purchase, possession, or consumption of alcohol and for the use of false identification. These weaknesses, as NAS points out, compromise the effectiveness of minimum drinking age laws.

The NAS recommendations to limit youth alcohol use focus on enacting and strengthening laws to: 1) reduce access through commercial sources; 2) reduce access through non-commercial sources; 3) reduce drinking and driving by underage drinkers; and 4) prescribe and enforce penalties on adult providers and underage drinkers.

In addition to closing loopholes in age 21 laws as mentioned above, NAS suggests, and MADD agrees, implementing key approaches to meeting these goals, including:

- Imposing more stringent penalties on retail licensees for violation of laws against sales to minors;
- Strengthening compliance check programs in retail outlets;
- Strengthening or enacting dram shop laws;
- Regulating internet sales and home delivery of alcohol;
- Holding adults responsible for illegal consumption of alcohol by minors;
- Implementing beer keg registration laws to deter the purchase of kegs of beer for consumption by minors;
- Strengthening enforcement of zero tolerance laws;
- Implementing the use of routine sobriety checkpoints to increase the deterrence of underage drinking and driving.

Enforcement of state and local laws has proven to be a highly effective tool in underage drinking prevention. Tougher enforcement of laws aimed at reducing underage drinking is greatly needed, and Congress can provide the impetus for action. In particular, MADD strongly supports NAS Recommendation 9-3:



9-3: The federal government should require states to achieve designated rates of retailer compliance with youth access prohibitions as a condition of receiving block grant funding, similar to the Synar Amendment's requirements for youth tobacco sales.

As part of a comprehensive strategy to reduce underage drinking, Congress should also provide additional resources to law enforcement in order to improve enforcement of underage drinking laws.

#### Expanding Youth-Oriented and Community Interventions

The NAS report underscores the need for expanding youth-oriented and community interventions, including: intensive research and development for a youth-focused national media campaign to prevent underage drinking; funding for and implementation of evidence-based education interventions, with priority given to those that incorporate effective elements and those that are part of comprehensive community programs; and improving assessment and treatment programs.

MADD strongly supports NAS Recommendation 11-2:

11-2: Public and private funders should support community mobilization to reduce underage drinking. Federal funding for reducing and preventing underage drinking should be available under a national program dedicated to community-level approaches to reducing underage drinking, similar to the Drug Free Communities Act, which supports communities in addressing substance abuse with targeted, evidence-based prevention strategies.

MADD's youth programs are rooted in the latest scientific research and strive to empower children, teens and parents with knowledge so that individuals will be able to keep themselves and others safe from harm. Programs encourage good decision-making and engage youth in specific interventions designed to reduce underage drinking.

One of MADD's most successful community based youth programs is called Youth In Action (YIA). MADD's YIA program partners young people with community adult leaders to work toward "environmental" prevention strategies. Projects focus on strengthening enforcement of underage drinking laws and policy change. YIA teams have been trained in more than 40 communities across the country. Their partnerships with local law enforcement agencies, schools and community leaders have helped pass key underage drinking legislation and saved young lives.

Youth In Action focuses on the community environment that condones underage drinking, from the store clerk who doesn't check IDs, to the police officer who might pour out the beer and send teens home, to an adult who doesn't mind buying beer for a kid who slips him an extra \$10 -- YIA teams look for community solutions instead of focusing their attention on their peers. Youth In Action teams engage in very specific interventions because research says these projects work. YIA teams across the country conduct:

- Alcohol Purchase Surveys

A young looking 21 year old attempts to purchase alcohol without an ID. No actual purchase is made. It is merely a survey to see if the clerk would have sold alcohol to a presumed minor without ID.

- Compliance Checks

With the help of the police, young people act as underage buyers. They are instructed to go through with the sale, whether the clerks ask for ID or not. The police may cite or

arrest the store clerk.

- **Shoulder-Tap Surveys**

With law enforcement present to ensure safety, a young person (or group of young people) approach strangers outside an alcohol retailer to see if these adults would willingly purchase alcohol for them because they are too young to legally buy. Those that answer yes receive instead of money, a card outlining the law and penalty for furnishing alcohol to a minor. Those that refuse to purchase alcohol are handed a card thanking them for serving their community by refusing to provide alcohol to a minor.

- **Law Enforcement Recognition Programs**

YIA teams publicly thank local law enforcement officials who are working to prevent underage drinking. This can be done many ways: a formal banquet, a media event, or even just by bringing food to officers at the station or out on location where police officers are working on the job. Either way, this is a unique opportunity for teens to thank police officers for doing their job.

- **Roll Call Briefings**

YIA teams set up meetings with their local police departments to make presentations at shift change meetings. Two or three YIA members go to the police station with an adult leader to encourage police officers to enforce the Zero Tolerance Law. Many YIA teams have printed cards or notepads to hand out outlining the law and declaring their support for it.

Two weeks ago while visiting New Orleans to attend the MADD National Conference, 20 young activists from YIA teams from across the country spent a Thursday night determining youth accessibility to alcohol in the "Big Easy" by measuring the number of adults willing to purchase alcohol for those under 21. The "shoulder tap" survey revealed that it is relatively easy for youth to get alcohol in New Orleans. Additionally, to help enforce the minimum drinking age law, YIA teams spoke at 10 New Orleans Police Department roll call briefings to demonstrate to law enforcement officers that young people believe that the enforcement of the 21 minimum drinking age law will change behavior and save lives.

Protecting You / Protecting Me (PY/PM) is another program developed by MADD in response to educators, parents, and community leaders seeking an alcohol-use prevention program for elementary school students that could be incorporated in to the core curriculum. PY/PM was named a Model Program by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Substance Abuse and Prevention (CSAP).

PY/PM includes the latest brain research, provides all curriculum and training materials necessary for national replication and includes an evaluation component, which continually demonstrates significant results.

The PY/PM curriculum teaches first through fifth graders basic safety skills, alcohol's effects on the developing brain and shows kids how to protect themselves by making good decisions, such as what to do when riding in a car with an unsafe driver. The curriculum is designed to fill the gap in current prevention programs that have not yet incorporated the latest research on children's brains and the developmental risks associated with exposure to alcohol before the age of 21.

The goal of the curriculum is to prevent injury and death of children and youth due to underage consumption of alcoholic beverages, and vehicle-related risks, especially as passengers in vehicles in which the driver is not alcohol-free.

Evaluation of PY/PM has shown that students receiving the lessons are:

- more knowledgeable about their brains
- more media literate
- less likely to ride with a driver who is not alcohol-free
- less likely to drink when they are teenagers

PY/PM is endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Association of Elementary School Principals. By the end of 2003, nearly 200,000 elementary students will be exposed to MADD's PY/PM's lessons in over 1,200 schools across the country.

#### Increasing Alcohol Excise Taxes

Research shows that alcohol taxes and price affect youth alcohol consumption and associated consequences. Studies demonstrate that increased beer prices lead to reductions in the levels and frequency of drinking and heavy drinking among youth and lower traffic crash fatality rates among young drivers.

MADD strongly supports NAS Recommendation 12-7:

12-7: Congress and state legislatures should raise excise taxes to reduce underage consumption and to raise additional revenues for this purpose. Top priority should be given to raising beer taxes, and excise tax rates for all alcoholic beverages should be indexed to the consumer price index so that they keep pace with inflation without the necessity of further legislative action.

Revenue generated from increased alcohol excise taxes could be designated, as NAS suggests, to fund a broad prevention strategy to reduce underage drinking. NAS concludes that "the long downward slide in the actual cost of these taxes to consumers has considerably exacerbated the underage drinking problem." (p. 246)

Despite the public health ramifications, the alcohol industry continues to push for lower alcohol excise taxes. In 1991, for the first time in 40 years, the federal excise tax on beer was raised from \$9 per barrel to \$18 per barrel (or 16 cents per six-pack to 32 cents per six pack).

MADD is strongly opposed to H.R. 1305 and S. 809, legislation seeking to "roll-back" the 1991 beer tax increase. The National Bureau of Economic Research has estimated that the 1991 increase saves 600 young lives each year in reduced traffic crashes.

Similarly, MADD is strongly opposed to H.R. 2950 and S. 1457, legislation seeking to roll-back the federal excise tax on distilled spirits to its pre-1985 level.

#### Conclusion

It is time for our nation -- from parents to communities to our political leaders at the national and state levels -- to end the complacent attitude about underage drinking and to take action to end this public health epidemic. There is an urgent need to expand prevention, treatment and community programs and improve enforcement of existing laws to prevent underage drinking. More youth drink alcohol than smoke tobacco or use other illegal drugs, yet federal investments in preventing underage drinking pale in comparison with resources targeted at preventing illicit drug use.

The media constantly reports on the countless numbers of alcohol-related deaths and injuries of today's youth, but our nation accepts and even enables these preventable tragedies. The future of our nation's youth continues to hang in the balance. Underage

drinking is illegal, and yet millions of kids continue to engage in this high-risk behavior every month, every weekend, and even every day.

The NAS has reviewed the research and has recommended strategies that will significantly reduce and prevent underage drinking: a national media campaign to prevent underage drinking, tougher standards for alcohol advertising, improved teen drinking prevention laws, better enforcement and awareness of these laws, expanded youth and community interventions, and increased federal and state excise taxes on alcohol – all areas that MADD's members view as critical to solving this problem.

MADD will continue to work with Members of Congress and with partners in the public health community to pursue introduction of a comprehensive, science-based legislative package designed to reduce and prevent underage drinking. I urge this Committee to use the NAS recommendations as a roadmap to create a healthier future for America's youth. The devastating effects of underage drinking are completely preventable. The NAS recommendations give us a new beginning and a fresh approach to attack this problem. We must, as a nation, ramp up our efforts, and today is a new beginning in that endeavor. Thank you.